

President Obama Expected to Sign the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Charlie Wilson (OH-6) today joined an overwhelming majority in the U.S. House of Representatives in voting to send President Obama legislation that will launch a new era of national service and volunteerism to help the nation emerge stronger from the economic crisis. The House passed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act by a vote of 275 to 149.

The legislation makes good on President Obama's call for Americans to do their part to help the nation's economy recover by making a difference in their communities. When enacted, this will be the first major piece of the President's agenda to receive overwhelming bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress.

"With so many Americans struggling, service is an important factor in our country's recovery," Wilson said. "There are some rumors floating around that say this bill would institute mandatory service, but that's just not true. This bill is about voluntary service, and I feel strongly that we should support and encourage people to get involved in their communities and their country."

Currently in Ohio, more than 54,000 people of all ages volunteer their time and energy to meet local needs, strengthen communities and increase civic engagement through 126 service projects across the state. They participate in Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America.

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, H.R. 1388, will provide the greatest expansion of national service since President John. F Kennedy first issued his call to serve over 50 years ago. Among other things, the bill will create 175,000 new volunteer opportunities through Americorps.

The legislation will more than triple the number of volunteers of all ages serving in this country through AmeriCorps and establish four new service corps: a Clean Energy Corps to increase energy efficiency and conservation, an Education Corps to help increase student engagement, achievement and graduation, a Healthy Futures Corps to help improve health care access, and a Veterans Service Corps to enhance services for veterans.

The bill will increase the education award to \$5,350 that members receive in exchange for their contributions, the same as the maximum Pell Grant scholarship. The bill will also permanently link the award to match any future increases in the Pell Grant. In addition, new opportunities will be created for older Americans and retirees and those volunteers will be allowed to transfer their education awards - up to \$1,000 for at least 350 hours of service - to a child, foster child or grandchild.

Other key provisions include establishing a new Summer of Service program to engage middle

and high school students in service, allowing them to earn a \$500 education award to be put toward college. The legislation will also help strengthen disaster relief efforts and establish an alumni corps of former service participants who can help respond during natural disasters and other emergencies.